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NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: LaDonna Fowler, project director, Native American Long-Term Supports, (406) 243-5764 or (406) 883-3817.

UM STAFF MEMBER NAMED ONE OF 20 GREAT LEADERS OF THE DISABILITY MOVEMENT

MISSOULA —

University of Montana staff member LaDonna Fowler of **Polson**, a leading advocate for American Indians with disabilities, will be honored as one of 20 great leaders of the disability rights movement June 19 in Chicago.

Fowler was selected for the honor by Access Living of Chicago, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary with the theme "20 Leaders for 20 Years" in the Grand Ballroom of Chicago's Navy Pier. According to Access Living, those chosen for the honor "collectively symbolize the richness, diversity and accomplishments of the disabilities community."

Fowler works for the Rehabilitation and Research Training Center, which is part of UM's Rural Institute on Disabilities. She directs two RRTC programs – American Indian Choices and American Indian Disability Legislation Projects.

Since the Americans with Disabilities Act doesn't apply to tribal lands, Fowler works with tribes across the nation to educate them about disabilities issues and help develop their own disabilities policies. She also is creating a network of leaders who advocate for Indians with disabilities, a group she said is often isolated, unrecognized or forgotten.

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Fowler chairs a disabilities subcommittee of the National Congress of American Indians. She also is a founding member of AIRROW, the American Indian Rehabilitation Rights Organization of Warriors, which pushes for improved rights and access for Indians with disabilities.

"LaDonna has emerged as a national leader, not only in American Indian circles but also within the broader disabilities community," RRTC Director Tom Seekins said. "She has organized an extraordinary network of people interested in American Indians and tribal government. I think what propels her is sheer dedication and commitment to the issues."

Fowler, 45, is an enrolled Assiniboiné at the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and has tribal affiliations with the Santee Sioux and Turtle Mountain Chippewa. Born with spina bifida, a birth defect affecting the spinal cord, she also is a wheelchair user. Fowler has spent most of her life on the Flathead Indian Reservation, and she worked for Salish Kootenai College from 1988 to 1994. The mother of a 15-year-old son and a 13-year-old daughter, Fowler joined UM in 1994.

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